

T. C. Power Mansion
604 Harrison Avenue
Helena
Lewis and Clark County
Montana

HABS No. MT-28

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

T. C. POWER MANSION

HABS No. MT-28

ADDRESS: 604 Harrison Ave., Helena, Lewis and Clark County, Montana.

OWNER: Diocese of Helena

OCCUPANT: Community of nuns

USE: Convent

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Thomas C. Power was one of the most successful business men in Montana. He began shipping merchandise from Omaha to Fort Benton in 1866, and the following year moved to Fort Benton to open a mercantile store. The business prospered, and soon he was freighting goods all over Montana and up into Canada.

Power moved to Helena in 1878, and within a few years had financial interests in banking, cattle and mining in addition to his mercantile business. He became president of the American National Bank in 1891.

In 1878, Power was elected to the first Territorial constitutional convention, and in 1888 was an unsuccessful candidate for governor. After Montana became a state, Wilbur F. Sanders and Thomas C. Power became its first Senators, with Sanders drawing the short term and Power the long term.

Senator and Mrs. Power moved into this mansion in August, 1891. It had been under construction for about two years, and was reputed to be one of the most elegant in Helena.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Thomas C. Power started shipping goods from Omaha to Fort Benton in 1866, and the next year moved to Fort Benton to open his own store. In 1868, he

started his freight lines which were soon hauling merchandise all over Montana and into Canada.

The stores at Fort Benton were dependent on the steamboats to bring in their supplies, and when the rates became exorbitant, Power, together with I. G. Baker & Son, had their own steamer built in Pittsburgh in 1874. The "Benton" proved so successful that in 1876 they built the "Helena", in 1878 the "Butte", and in 1879 they bought the "Black Hills". Power became president of the "Benton P" steamer line.

In addition to freight lines to all the towns and mining camps in Montana, Power established stage lines from Ft. Benton to Helena and from Ft. Benton to Billings. In 1878, he moved to Helena to direct his many business interests. Branch stores were established in Helena and Bozeman as well. His business interests multiplied. In 1878, Power and several pioneer cattlemen organized the Judith Basin Cattle Company and initiated cattle-ranching in that stock country. He had interests in several sheep outfits as well, shipping the fleeces down the Missouri from Fort Benton. In 1890, Power helped organize the American National Bank, and became its president.

Politics interested Power from his early days in Montana, and he was one of the leaders of the Republican party. In 1878, he was a member of the first Territorial constitutional convention, and in 1884 was a delegate to the national Republican convention. In 1889, Power was candidate for governor of the state, but was defeated by Joseph K. Toole. The state legislative assembly met soon after, with the task of naming two men as U.S. senators. However, the Democratic members bolted and set up their own assembly. The result was that the Republicans named T. C. Power and W. F. Sanders as senators, and the Democrats named W. A. Clark and Martin Maginnis for the same offices. All four men went to Washington, where the question over which should be seated was referred to the Congressional Committee on Privileges and Elections. On March 24, 1890, that committee recommended that Sanders

and Power be admitted to the Senate. The two men drew to determine which should have the short term and which should have the long, and T. C. Power drew the long term which expired in 1895. While in the Senate, Power was instrumental in obtaining appropriations for locating and building Fort Harrison, the federal building in Helena, the fish hatchery near Bozeman and an Indian school near Great Falls.

In Helena, T. C. Power had several business blocks built, including the massive Power Block which stands today. In August, 1891, he and Mrs. Power moved into their elegant new mansion which was just completed. It had been under construction for some two years, and all of Helena was anxious to see it.

An open house was held on November 27, 1891, and the Helena Weekly Herald described the house in this way:

"Senator and Mrs. Power were at home to their many friends of the capitol city last evening. The elegant family mansion, in course of construction for upwards of two years past and only recently completed, was the meeting place of hundreds of guests summoned by the host and hostess to their newly occupied home....

"The interior of the Power house was the admiration of the hundreds who tarried during the evening, in its tastefully appointed and richly furnished apartments. Corridors, halls and rooms -- all are superbly furnished in hardwoods and the adornments, works of art and all else are there that contribute to the richness and elegance of the modern home of wealth and refinement.

"...No other home in the state can surpass it in tastefulness of architecture and beauty and elegance of interior arrangement and appointment. The site occupied by the mansion is one of the most commanding on the west side of the city, overlooking a broad sweep of valley and mountain, its view extending to scores of miles east, north and west to the further-

most outlines of the Prickly Pear, and Belt, and Rocky ranges."

The architect for the building is not known, but it is considered likely that it was the firm of Shafer and Reed, the architects who designed and supervised the Power Block, a business block built at Sixth and Main Street for T. C. Power and an associate. The Power Block is in the same Romanesque style as the residence.

In 1932, the house was left to Bishop Joseph M. Gilmore through the will of Charles Benton Power, Jr. It was used as a residence for the Bishop of the Diocese of Helena for a number of years, and is now a convent for nuns who teach in the Helena Catholic Central High School. The original stable was converted to a Chancery.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND REFERENCES

- Hamilton, James M., From Wilderness to Statehood, Binford and Mort, Portland, Oregon, 1957.
Helena Independent (newspaper), Helena, Montana, March 23, 1923.
Helena Weekly Herald (newspaper), Helena, Montana December 3, 1891.
Miller, Joaquin, An Illustrated History of the State of Montana, Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, 1894.
Pace, John W. and Mock, H. J., The Montana Blue Book: A Biographical, Historical and Statistical Book of Reference, The Journal Publishing Co., Helena, 1891.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

EXTERIOR

Overall Dimensions - 49' x 81'-8", excluding porches; three stories and full basement.

Foundation - native granite.

Wall Construction - cut stone bearing walls;

native gray granite foundation, reddish granite above.

Porches - One in the northeast corner served originally as the main carriage entrance. Here a large Romanesque arched stone porch projects outward 14'-8" from the building and is 18'-4" deep, supported by double columns. A curved porch, now used as the front porch, projects a few feet beyond the paired turrets. Four graceful Romanesque arches carried upon columns with shafts of polished porphyry mark the entry. The porch floor is ceramic tile, and a carved stone railing caps the porch cornice.

Openings - Entrances: The original main, or carriage, entry is not accessible today to the public. The south, or present front, entry is a single panel oak door.

Windows: D.H. 1/1 wood sash, three leaded glass windows with leaded glass transoms; the third floor has D.H. 6/1 windows.

Roof - wood shingles, hip roof, approximately 45° pitch; two large turrets, one each on the southeast and southwest corners of the building.

Chimneys - stone.

INTERIOR

The interior space was adapted to meet the needs of the Bishop of the Diocese of Helena shortly after the church acquired the property in 1932. Within the past few years the house has been converted to a convent for the Catholic sisters. Access beyond the ground floor was not gained by the investigator.

Floor Plan - The first floor has not been altered to any great extent. From the present main entry, asymmetrically located on the south facade, one enters a small entry hall or open vestibule. To the left and within the west turret is the dining room, to the right of the entry is the parlor,

and beyond within the east turret and extending north half the distance is the den or library which today is a chapel. The small entry leads to a grand hall running east and west. The north-east entry, or original main carriage entrance, enters the grand hall just north of the library.

The staircase is across from the small entry hall and leads up to the second floor. The west end of the building due north and also west of the dining room is devoted to kitchen, storage and backstairs.

The second floor has been extensively altered to meet the housing needs of the nuns. The only recollection offered by the present inhabitants is that the master bedroom was probably located above the dining room (west turret).

The third floor was a ballroom. The basement today houses a library, storerooms, boiler room and laundry facilities.

Fireplaces - in the grand hall, original library (present chapel) and parlor.

Stairway - open stairway to second floor with oak balustrade.

Floor - oak.

Wall and Ceiling Material - plaster, some wall-paper, tapestries, hardwood wainscot, beamed ceiling.

Doors - panel, hardwood.

Trim - all elaborately moulded hardwood.

Hardware - brass, possibly some cast iron in servants' area.

Lighting - gas.

Heating - steam.

OTHERS

General Setting - The house was once situated on a prominent hill overlooking the valley. Today the main building sets back but a short distance from the two streets that intersect at the south-east corner of the property. North of the building there is approximately a quarter of a city block of open land where once stood another residence.

Enclosures - native granite low stone wall.

Outbuildings - The original carriage house to the west and north of the main residence has been added onto extensively and is now as large as, if not larger than, the home. It is used as the Chancery.

Report Prepared by: John N. DeHaas, Jr.
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